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11. The following are brief items of interest compiled by Embassy Minsk.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Civil Society

- Pro-GOB Youth Union Reports on Successes (para. 2)
- Opposition Leaders Harassed in Brest (para. 3)
- Opposition Youth Sentenced to Jail and Fines (para. 4)
- Free-Lancers Warned over Reporting for Foreign Radio (para. 5)
- Uzbek Trafficker Arrested in Kobrin (para. 6)
- Judge Dismisses Reports Church Hearing Scheduled (para. 7)

Domestic Economy

- IMF: Higher Energy Prices to Impact Belarus' Economy (para. 8)

International Trade

- Russia's Slavneft Resumes Oil Supplies to Belarus (para. 9)
- Belarus Bans Food Imports from Russian Region (para. 10)
- Quote of the Week (para. 11)

Civil Society

12. Pro-GOB Youth Union Reports on Successes

Belarusian National Youth Union (BNYU) Head Leonid Kovalyov said at a press conference on September 4 that the BNYU's membership had increased from 30,000 to 430,000 people since its establishment in 12002. He also noted that the main goal of "mobilizing youths' initiative for the good of Belarusian society" has been achieved as the BNYU focuses on specific deeds, activities, and results. Kovalyov claimed that 780 BNYU personnel assisted 135,000 people in five years in finding employment, and that organization's income in 2007 will top USD 300,000 due to such profitable businesses as a radio station and a travel agency.

13. Opposition Leaders Harassed in Brest

Police detained United Civic Party Head Anatoly Lebedko, Acting Chairperson of the Belarusian Social-Democratic Party "Gramada" Anatoly Levkovich, and Belarusian Party of Communists Leader Sergey Kalyakin for about an hour in Brest on August 31. The police blocked their vehicle and forced it to pull over for an ID check. Lebedko and Kalyakin also claimed that upon returning from Brest

they discovered their car's wheel had been tampered with. The three party chairs came to Brest to meet with the local opposition leaders, market vendors, deliver foodstuff to jailed democratic leader Pavel Severinets, and to attend trials of civil society activists arrested at the meeting with Severinets on August 19.

14. Opposition Youth Sentenced to Jail and Fines

On September 5, a Soligorsk district court judge sentenced two opposition youth activists, Ales Kalita and Lyudmila Otokulova, to seven days in jail. Six other activists received fines ranging from USD 58 to 72. The court found them guilty of disturbing public peace and violating demonstration procedures when the youth protested at the trial of local Malady Front leader Ivan Shilo on September 4 (reftel). All the activists spent a night at the detention center.

15. Free-Lancers Warned over Reporting for Foreign Radio

Two Grodno independent journalists, Natalya Makushina and Yan Roman, were summoned to district prosecutor's office on September 3 to receive warnings over violations of media accreditation requirements. The prosecutor accused Makushina, reporter for Polish-based Radio Racja, and Roman, reporter for German Deutsche Welle, of writing "biased" articles hurting Belarus' image abroad. Makushina told the media that the prosecutor failed to provide any evidence of contacts with foreign radio stations and only produced copies of her articles from various internet sites. The Foreign Ministry's spokesperson said that the two reporters never applied for accreditation.

16. Uzbek Trafficker Arrested in Kobrin

An Uzbek woman was arrested in the southwestern city of Kobrin on September 1 on suspicion of recruiting Belarusian women in Belarus for sexual exploitation in Moscow. The police detained the 37-year

MINSK 00000771 002 OF 002

old woman at a railroad station with three Belarusian women of 19 and 20 years of age, whom she was allegedly planning to take to brothels in Moscow. Police opened a criminal case against the woman, whom reportedly had never been charged with trafficking before.

17. Judge Dismisses Reports Church Hearing Scheduled

On September 5, Supreme Court judge Elena Korotkevich dismissed reports that the new hearings on the New Life Church (NLC) were set to resume in September. The Minsk authorities informed the NLC in a letter that, according to court's secretariat, the hearings would be scheduled in September. NLC Legal Expert Sergey Lukanin said that it was news to Korotkevich. She explained that the court would not be reviewing the case any time in the near future. The NLC is appealing the forced sale of its property to the state.

Domestic Economy

18. IMF: Higher Energy Prices to Impact Belarus' Economy

The International Monetary Fund issued a report predicting a 10-15 percent cumulative GDP loss for Belarus through 2012 due to increasing energy prices, with up to a five percent decrease in 2007 alone. The IMF report notes that the recent positive economic climate in Belarus -- a growing economy and declining inflation -- is primarily due to the subsidized prices for Russian oil and gas. The IMF also reports that the Belarusian currency is overvalued by approximately ten percent.

International Trade

19. Russia's Slavneft Resumes Oil Supplies to Belarus

Russia's Slavneft has resumed crude oil supplies to Belarus in a

deal allowing the company further processing and sales rights in Belarus' domestic market. The company will resume supplies with a monthly volume of 200,000 tons, much of which will be used as gasoline and diesel for its own filling stations in Belarus. Currently, Belarus subsidizes 90 percent of the cost of Russian export duties on crude supplied to Belarus, an incentive not sufficient to attract Russian traders. Russia discounts the export duty by 71.7 percent for crude destined to CIS countries compared to other markets.

¶10. Belarus Bans Food Imports from Russian Region

On September 5, Belarus' Agriculture Ministry suspended issuing authorizations for food imports from Russia's Krasnodar region. The ministry cited the recent outbreak of bird flu in that province as the reason for the move. Belarus' imports from Krasnodar mostly consist of limited quantities of grain and forage. In the past, Belarus has suspended food imports from 19 countries -- including France, Germany and the Czech Republic. Normally, such bans are lifted six months after the last instance of bird flu has been detected.

¶11. Quote of the Week

The prosecutor in the case of Malady Front activist Ivan Shilo told the court that the state did not single out the youth because of his political beliefs. To support his argument that the prosecution was not politically motivated, the prosecutor claimed that the GOB "would even prosecute a member of an unregistered organization of hamster lovers."

Stewart